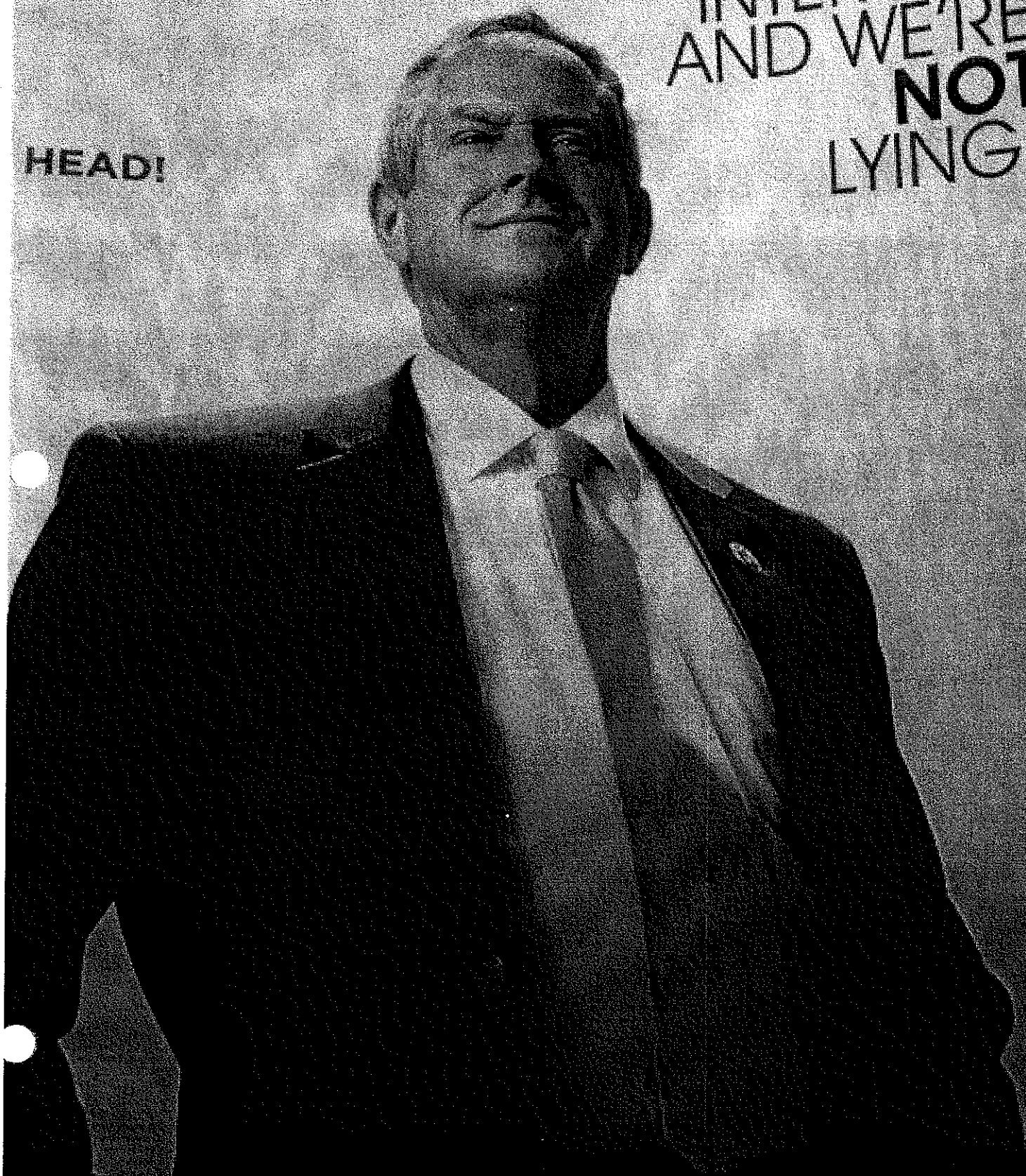


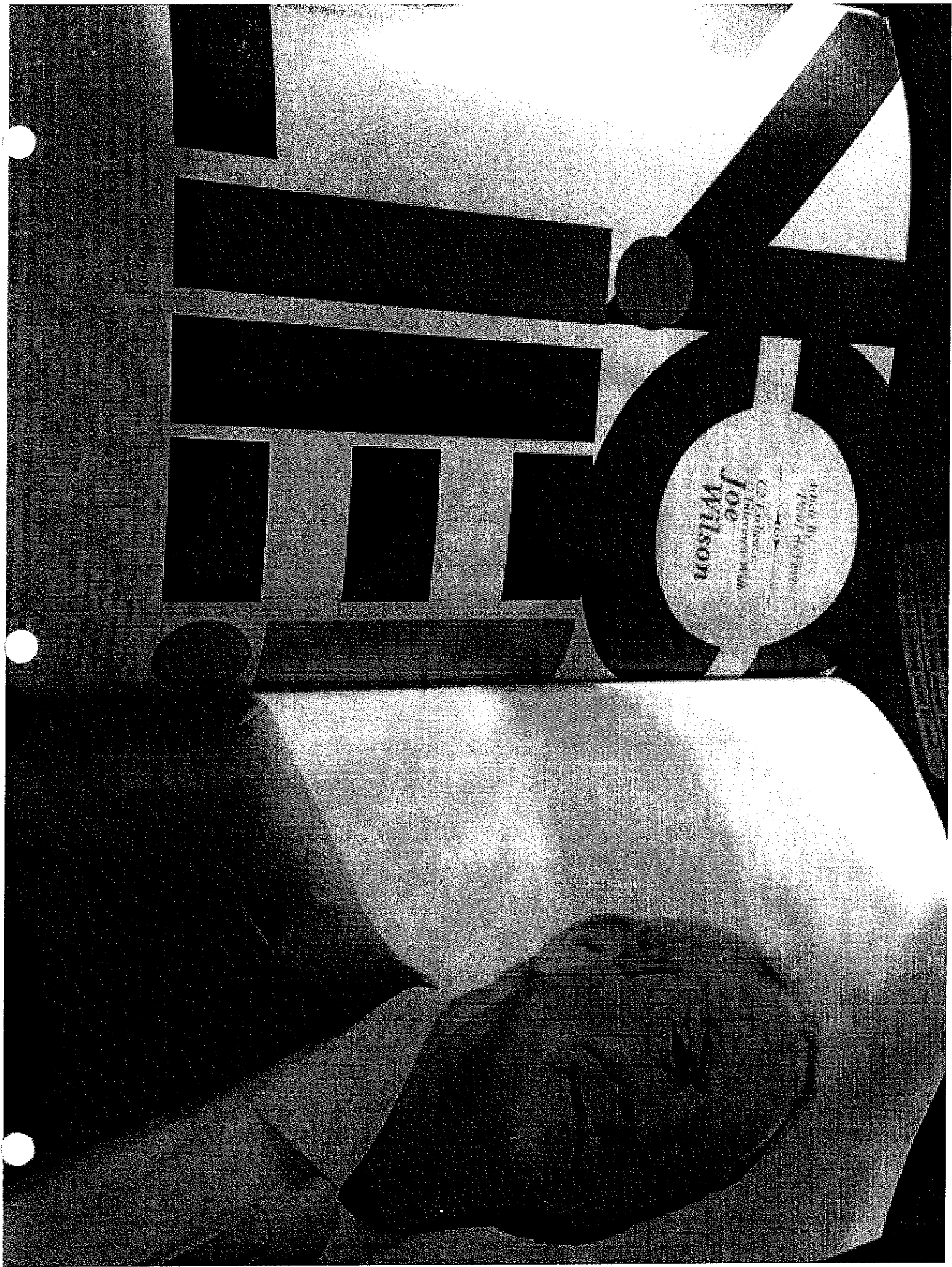
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JUNE 2010

C2 EXCLUSIVE **JOE
WILSON**
INTERVIEW
AND WE'RE
NOT
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HEAD!





June 2010

NO LIE! C2 Exclusive: Interview With Joe Wilson

Author: Paul deVere | Photographer: Mark Staff

South Carolina's Second Congressional District runs from the suburbs of Columbia down to Hilton Head Island and the Georgia state line. It has been a Republican enclave since 1965. Currently, it is Congressman Joe Wilson's territory and has been since 2001. A native of Charleston, he still has that city's distinctive lilt and charm when he speaks.

Before the evening of September 9, 2009, Wilson was well known and respected in his district, but not that well known on the national stage. Then came President Barack Obama's address to a joint session of Congress to outline his proposed reform of the U.S. health care system. In a sudden burst of emotion, when Obama said the reforms would not cover illegal immigrants, Wilson shouted out the much publicized "You lie!" He quickly apologized to President Obama for his comment, but almost immediately was put in the national spotlight, a hero to some, a villain to others.

But the Joe Wilson who stopped by CH2's office for an interview was Second District Representative Wilson, campaigner Wilson, proud father Wilson, and next-door-neighbor-friendly Wilson, Heritage Classic Foundation honorary trustee, rolled into one. (That last designation means he gets to wear the Foundation's plaid jacket.) Since it was Verizon Heritage week, writer Paul deVere asked him about the jacket.

C2: So you get to wear the plaid jacket?

Congressman Joe Wilson: On a trip to Scotland, I met the First Secretary, Alex Salmond, who was the equivalent prime minister of Scotland. I was telling him how grateful I was that I represented Hilton Head Island, which has the Heritage Golf Classic, which is the heritage of Scotland. He was somewhat interested, but I could tell that he thought I was just giving the Chamber of Commerce view of life. I said, "Minister, I know you're quite familiar with the Masters, where the winner gets the green jacket. He said, "Yes." I said, "At the Heritage, you get a plaid jacket." Then it kicked in. When he visited Washington, he brought an authentic golf club from the St. Andrews course, from the 1800s, which he presented to the trustees of the Heritage on the steps of the (U.S.) Capitol. I had my plaid jacket on and so, on the floor of Congress, gave a speech about the significance of the Heritage. I was then on the front page of every publication on Capitol Hill. You can work really hard on legislation and not get coverage. But I had on the right coat. It was really fun to be able to promote this community.

C2: While you have to deal with politics on a national level, it's said that all politics is local. One local issue close to you is the Jasper port.

JW: From day one, when the port was discussed, I met with Senator Clementa Pinckney. I served with him in the State Senate and I was the first Republican ever to be chairman of the Senate transportation committee in 2001. So he briefed me on the port, and I understood, since I grew up in Charleston, the significance of the port. I knew it would be very positive for the greater community. With US Senator Jim DeMint, the Coast Guard took us on a boat tour of the site. I've also toured the site by helicopter. Again the Coast Guard gave me an opportunity. I have seen the site from every angle, and I believe it is excellent. The first concern I had was its impact on the resort, tourism, hospitality industry. It would not be negative at all. It wouldn't be observable. The intent to me is not to have this port take the place of Savannah or Charleston.

C2: It would also bring jobs.

JW: It would bring thousands of jobs. My campaign is focused on jobs, and I am promoting job creation in the district. In fact, I have been working on job creation for a number of years. Governor Jim Edwards appointed me to the State Development Board which is the forerunner of today, the State Department of Commerce. So from 1975 to 1980, I served on the Development Board to help recruit industry, and I worked very closely with Governor Edwards to recruit Michelin. In fact, there are three Michelin plants in the district that I represented—Lexington County. I take very seriously efforts to recruit industry. Most recently, I have been working with the Secretary of Commerce, Joe Taylor, to recruit Boeing to North Charleston. That will have a direct impact here in the Lowcountry, because aerospace industry will find this to be a very positive location.

C2: Washington seems more contentious. Is there one reason or is it many reasons?

JW: I don't think it is more contentious. I do see a greater ideological split in that the Republicans are strongly supportive of limited government and expanded freedom. I am very concerned that the Democrat party is moving further to the left, supporting big government. I think that the level of discourse there has always been significant division, but I see a very significant ideological division. There used to be a significant number of conservative and moderate Democrats. There aren't now. We used to have moderate, even liberal, Republicans, but they were actually defeated, sadly to me, as evidenced in the Northeast. Moderate Republicans were defeated, not by Republicans, but by Democrats. So there was a purging of the party. I am very confident that the Republican Party is centered right, which I believe is what represents the country. And so it is mainstream conservative. This is why I am very optimistic as people now see, sadly, the consequences of big government, with legislation relative to healthcare takeover, to a national energy tax, to reckless spending, and out-of-control budgets. When people wanted a change, I am confident that is not the change that a lot of people felt would occur.

C2: Let's get to what you do for a living. Your Beaufort office alone gets 150 calls a day from constituents. What's it like for you on a day-to-day basis?

JW: To me, it is invigorating. I represent very dynamic people. It is a composite of America. I have people (retirees, military) from every state. This district has a high education level, so that makes people more prone to contact our office, which I appreciate. It is exciting. I am very grateful for new media. I am very happy to be in touch with my constituents, and they are in touch with me by Tweeting, on Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. I also am an active communicator with bloggers. I see a real benefit of other means of communication through talk radio and through the Internet. Also, due to the 24-hour news channels, Americans today know more about issues than ever before. I obviously have a very high regard as a former journalism student for Fox News. I believe they do present both sides of the news.

C2: One final question. The comment that made you famous, how has that changed your life?

JW: Well, first of all I appreciate the support I have received from all across the country and from every county in South Carolina. That support is an understanding that I am a gentleman and I am passionate about issues. I've done research on the issues and my agreement after that night with the White House was to have a civil discussion. Since that time, that is exactly what I have been working on—to have a civil discussion of the issues. I believe that the issues are very clear, as stated in the beginning. We have a contrasting ideological view of limited government versus big government. I believe that the American people are a center right, not left. We can win the debate.